

Strategy Research Project International Fellow

Back to Essentials: Virtues and Character for Strategic Leaders

by

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United States Army War College
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**BACK TO ESSENTIALS:
VIRTUES AND CHARACTER FOR STRATEGIC LEADERS**

by

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ABSTRACT

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The validity of education in virtues for leaders has been stressed for centuries. However, the current trend focuses instead on cognitive and managerial aspects of leadership, minimizing the importance of the virtues and therefore, of character. In order to demonstrate the influence that virtues have in the achievement of strategic leadership competencies, this paper analyzes the relationship between them. Based on the identified relationships, the paper suggests the advantages of considering virtues and character as a critical basis of executive behavior, and hence necessary for the education for strategic leaders. The model proposed has broader application, and this study suggests some aspects for further research.

BACK TO ESSENTIALS: VIRTUES AND CHARACTER FOR STRATEGIC LEADERS

Pericles indeed, by his rank, ability and known integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude- in short, to lead them instead of being led by them.

—Thucydides
The Landmark¹

Thucydides describes Pericles as having three aspects that thousands of years ago were the basis for great leaders: rank, which included demonstrated experience; ability, which encompassed cognitive skills; and integrity, which meant character, or the complete set of well-developed virtues. For centuries, the same requirements have been stressed for strategic leader development.

Strategic leadership is a concept widely used in civilian and military domains. It usually applies to executives with important responsibilities, large budgets, a significant number of employees, and long time-lines. The strategic environment in which these activities occur is defined as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.² The complex environment also implies situations that are more difficult to define, including relationships outside the organization and responsibilities that differ from the lower levels of leadership.³ Therefore, strategic leaders have to make decisions based on the limited evidence and data they have available. In other words, the lack of clear cause and effect relationships makes strategic decision-making extremely difficult.

For leaders, the more complex the environment, the more difficult it is to limit their specific responsibilities, and the more important it is for them to possess a wide variety of attributes in order to face the challenges they have to confront. Some attributes are common to all levels of leadership, but others are specific to the strategic

level. Many of these attributes have been the object of recent studies by social scientists. There is not a widely accepted set of strategic leadership responsibilities; they are described in the literature of leadership as competencies, attributes, or metacompetencies. But there is not much literature on how leaders can achieve or integrate these values into their everyday personal responsibilities.⁴

Strategic leaders are not the only ones who must understand the principles of strategic leadership. Individuals who work one or two levels below the strategic leader and who advise them on their responsibilities would also benefit from a more sophisticated perspective. By understanding the strategic environment and way of thinking, subordinate commanders and staff will be able to support strategic leaders or even take their positions when required.⁵

The lack of linkage between values and competencies received the attention of Sydney Finklestein, an expert on strategic leadership. In his seminal book *Strategic Leadership* he describes values as descriptions of preferences which determine a temptation or state of opinion. "Personal values are conceptions of what the individual aspires to. Social values have to do with what the person finds desirable in others or in the broader social system."⁶ According to Finklestein, there is a need for further development on the way values are converted into action.⁷

There are a number of proposals that describe how to achieve the values, and how to translate those pictures of preferences into consolidated attributes. One example is the US Army Field Manual 6-22, Leadership, which includes one chapter for Strategic Leaders. In it, attributes describe what the leader is and competencies illustrate what

the leader does. According to the manual, the way to become effective is by achieving the Army Values, which are explained throughout it.⁸

The basis for values is virtues, according to Professor Peter Kreeft, who explains the relationship between them. He identifies the four virtues defined by Plato as “the hinges” on which all the rest of virtues turn.⁹ Following Professor Kreeft’s rationale, Alexandre Havard’s book *Virtuous Leadership* proposes the importance of character for leaders.¹⁰ Havard also suggests that virtues are values put into action.¹¹ Such proposals are an appropriate starting point towards filling the gap identified by Finklestein.

In summary, the work that strategic leaders accomplish is often defined by what they do; the complex tasks that are reflected in their competencies. This study suggests that a focus on competencies is incomplete. The way strategic leaders behave, their competencies, is defined by who they are: their virtues and their character. Said another way, this paper follows the Army’s model and distinguishes who the leader *is* from what the leader *does*.¹² In doing so, this research suggests that virtues are the main characteristics that define a person and should receive greater emphasis in executive development. Focusing on competencies is incomplete because it limits the perspective to the requirements of the leadership position and arbitrarily separates the person from his responsibilities.¹³

Methodology. This paper develops Finklestein’s suggestion about the lack of development of the way values are converted into action. For that purpose, the study begins by identifying the responsibilities that strategic leaders hold. The paper considers the most relevant theories about strategic leadership and, from them, proposes a common set of competencies. Once the competencies have been identified and

defined, the paper conducts a similar analysis for virtues, identifying the common ones from the most relevant taxonomies of virtues across cultures. Once the most common strategic leadership competencies and a set of common virtues have been defined, the paper compares the competencies with the virtues in order to determine the degree to which virtues affect competencies. This comparison is the crux of the paper. The comparison focuses on the reasons why each virtue is relevant to each competency or why it is not. After the comparison, the study concludes with a discussion of the relative importance of each virtue for strategic leadership.

The result of this analysis should be consequential for the development of strategic leadership. Some examples of its effects include the identification of virtues related to the strategic level; the setting of aspects useful for counseling and education; the focus on virtues to achieve the responsibilities associated with strategic positions; and the justification for an education in virtues in order to identify, discuss, and develop those that are required for future strategic leaders.

Strategic Leadership Competencies

One of the first authoritative studies of strategic leadership is Henry Mintzberg's work on management four decades ago. From this work, scholars identified some areas of responsibility for strategic leaders more recently referred to as competencies and subsequently grouped in metacompetencies.¹⁴ Stephen Gerras defines competencies as "the knowledge, skills, attributes and capacities that enable a leader to perform his required traits."¹⁵ He stresses the possibility that the competencies can be improved "through education, and most often by reflective experience." John Briscoe and Douglas Hall define metacompetency as "a competency that is so powerful that it affects the person's ability to acquire other competencies."¹⁶ According to them there are two core

competencies, adaptability and identity. They suggest that a model for competencies by itself has no substance; instead, they are the organizational values that reinforce the corporate culture of most companies.

Based on the above definitions, this study considers Mintzberg's work on the management competencies.¹⁷ The paper also includes, from a management point of view, Briscoe and Hall, in order to capture the first proposal of metacompetencies for Strategic Leaders.¹⁸ In addition, the study incorporates the work of Duane Ireland and Michael Hitt, which provides a view of the generic activities strategic leaders have to perform.¹⁹

In order to capture the military point of view, the paper includes three military specific taxonomies. First is Leonard Wong's study at the Army War College in 2003 to identify military competencies that are specific to the strategic level.²⁰ The second is Stephen Gerras' Strategic Leadership Primer that proposes competencies for strategic leaders, focusing on the military context.²¹ Finally, the study considers Chapter 12, Strategic Leadership, of the Field Manual 6-22, Army Leadership.²²

Ultimately the six models depict the managerial competencies that are common for strategic leaders. The comparison and alignment among these competency frameworks is below. This comparison integrates the work of Mintzberg; Briscoe & Hall; Wong et al; Ireland & Hit; Wong et al; Gerras et al; and the US Army FM 6-22.

The study of the alignment of the competencies is made more complex because competencies, attributes and metacompetencies are defined with various levels of scope and clarity. Therefore the lines that separate the clusters are not perfectly defined. In order to clarify this problem, this paper considers the different dimensions of

competencies that will have a similar impact on the work of the strategic leaders. The alignment considers the importance of competencies and how each competency correlates with others in different taxonomies. The purpose of the alignment is to determine a common set of areas of competencies for strategic leaders.

Mintzberg, Executive Roles, 1973	Briscoe & Hall, 1999 Metacompetencies	Ireland & Hit Activities, 2005	Wong et al, 2003 Metacompetencies	Gerras et al, 2010 Competencies	US Army FM 6-22. Competencies, 2006	Areas of work	Areas of competency
Entrepreneur	Exploration		Identity	Frame of Reference development	Establishes, intent & purpose	<i>Intent & purpose</i>	Futuring
	Flexibility	Determine Vision	Mental Agility	Envisioning Future	Providing vision motivation and inspiration; Strategic Planning	<i>Vision</i>	
Monitor	Flexibility; Modify self-perceptions		Cross-cultural Savvy; Mental Agility	Systems understanding; Political & Social competencies		<i>Awareness</i>	Openmindedness
	Comfort with Change; Dialogue skills; Openness; Open to people and ideas		Interpersonal maturity	JiIM relationships; Consensus building	Seeks / open ideas and points of view	<i>Openness</i>	
Spoke-person; Figure head; Liaison	Dialogue Skills			Communication	Communicates	<i>Communication</i>	Influence / Potential power
Leader; Disseminator		Organizational Culture; Emphasize ethical practices	Identity; Interpersonal maturity	Negotiation	Extend Influence; Build Strategic consensus; Lead by Example	<i>Influence</i>	
	Rewarding subordinates; Personal feedback	Develop Human Capital			Develop others	<i>Develops his personnel</i>	Human Development
	Self – Assessment; Personal values				Prepares self; Expand technical and tactical knowledge	<i>Develops oneself</i>	
Disturbance handling; Negotiator; Resource allocator	Comfort with Change	Determine & Maintain Core competencies; Organize Controls	Professional Astuteness; Technical Competency; World class warrior	Problem Management	Strategic Planning; Negotiating within & beyond national boundaries	<i>Management skills</i>	Management

Table 1: Comparison of Strategic Leader Competencies

Based on the comparison of the different competency models, this study identifies nine different areas of work for strategic leaders: identifying the intent and purpose of the organization; determining its vision; perceiving and understanding the signals of the environment (awareness), capturing and incorporating different ideas; communicating with the required internal and external audiences; influencing within and outside the organization; developing the leader's own strategic skills and those of his personnel; and acquiring and exercising the strategic management skills. In order to refine the alignment and have a broader vision of the responsibilities, the nine areas of competency have been further grouped in five broader categories: futuring, openmindedness, influence, human development, and management. Each of these five is described in more detail below.

Futuring is the time element that relates to exploration of the frame of reference or environment and shaping the future. Futuring includes assessing the environment to identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.²³ It will be translated by the leader into the intent and purpose of his organization, and subsequently into a vision.

Openmindedness is the area that includes two facets: awareness and openness. Awareness is the group of competencies that permit strategic leaders to properly understand the systems in which they work. Openness is the need and aptitude to search other's ideas and people, being able to converse with others of different perspectives, and being able to incorporate those ideas and points of view when appropriate.

Influence is the ability to properly develop the power relationships that a leader must establish. Influence includes the process to properly communicate vision, purpose, and intent in order to help achieve results. Influence is also the way a leader extends his authority beyond his sphere of control by emphasizing ethical practices and leading by example. Some suggest that this factor distinguishes leaders from managers, as Admiral Stavridis, citing Winston Churchill, emphasized that the difference between management and leadership is solely based in communication.²⁴ This study takes a broader view of the difference between them: communication is but one way to influence, and leaders use several other means to influence. Therefore, this paper assumes influence derives from the ability to motivate, inspire, encourage, communicate, and model ethical behavior.²⁵

Human development is the set of functions that strategic leaders perform to educate and develop themselves and their staff. The natural consequence of a leader focused in self-development is to seek the growth of his team. For this purpose, the leader will set the environment and allocate the necessary resources. A leader's own human and professional maturity process will encourage subordinates to follow his model. As Briscoe and Hall suggest, this personal development is very difficult. They propose and discuss a new focus on continuous personal learning. They further suggest that teaching executives how to learn can be a necessary process for their development.²⁶

Management includes all professional responsibilities that strategic leaders have to insure efficient processes exist within their organization. This area of competency includes professional astuteness; technical competency; problem management;

negotiation; and strategic planning and control. For the purposes of this study, the management area of competency also includes all the competencies that strategic leaders would exercise that are not clearly included in the other four areas. While some of the competency categories listed here are unique to the strategic level, the management function has more applicability at every organizational level.

Strategic Leadership Virtues

Values and virtues are often used interchangeably in the current literature. In the dictionary there are 12 entries for the term “value.” Leadership is only mentioned in one; the rest are focused on the expression of a quantifiable or measurable.²⁷ Therefore, the most useful definition of values for the purpose of this study excludes those in the dictionary and, instead, includes those in the realm of sociology, where values are “the ideals, customs, institutions, etc., of a society toward which the people of the group have an affective regard.”²⁸ In other words, values are the defined end state of either an individual or a collective. This definition is adopted in this study.

Closely related to values is the concept of virtues. Virtue is defined as: “1. Moral practice or action; conformity to a standard of right (as divine law or the highest good); moral excellence; integrity of character uprightness of conduct. A particular moral excellence.”²⁹ Other sources allude to “effective force; power or potency,” and suggest its validity as enablers, or ways to achieve a specific value.³⁰ At the same time, virtue is the foundation, the way, the potential, and the power that an individual has in order to achieve the end state represented by values. Virtues are not inborn but must be achieved and the real merit accrues in the endless struggle towards that achievement, though no one achieve perfection. Therefore, this study considers a value as an objective and also asserts that value must be achieved via the exercise of virtues.

Virtues are acquired through intensive practice and they help avoid excesses.³¹ In that sense, Aristotle emphasized the hard work needed to achieve virtues, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.” Moreover, the Greek philosopher proposed, “All virtue is summed up in dealing justly.”³² Therefore, virtue is the essence of moderation and judgment.

The set of virtues of a human being constitutes his character. General Schwarzkopf stresses the importance of character and its relationship to leadership: “Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must without one, be without strategy.”³³

Using virtues as the enabler to achieve values and to shape character, this section also identifies the most important virtues that are common to a significant number of different typologies in the world. In order to be all-encompassing, this comparison considers the ones defined by two major religions, Christianity and Islam. To include a non-religious perspective, this study also includes the set of virtues identified by French philosopher André Comte-Sponville.³⁴ Finally, the model takes into account two US typologies: one identified by Benjamin Franklin and the other included in the Army Manual of Leadership.³⁵

A comparison of these different taxonomies indicates they are remarkably similar, making the alignment clearer than the model regarding leadership responsibilities and competencies. The table below proposes an alignment and identifies the seven virtues that are significant for this study: prudence; justice; humility; self-control or temperance; courage or fortitude; generosity; and compassion.

The identification of these seven virtues does not imply that they are the most important in all the typologies proposed, yet they are very important. Other virtues could have been included in the study, but all the sources consulted agreed that those seven are common across most major belief systems, including many not sampled in Table 2, such as Hinduism.³⁶ The key point in this study is to show the relevance that virtues have to character and to strategic leadership behavior. To adapt this model to a particular culture, a more focused analysis should be done.³⁷

Greek & Roman Virtues	Christian Virtues	Islamic Virtues	Benjamin Franklin	Comte-Sponville	Havard	PROPOSAL
Prudence	Wisdom; Prudence	Prudence		Prudence	Prudence	Prudence
Justice	Justice	Justice	Justice	Justice	Justice	Justice
	Humility	Humility	Humility	Humility	Humility	Humility
Fortitude	Fortitude; Moderation	Contentment	Temperance	Temperance	Self-control	Self-control
<i>Dutifulness Discipline</i>	Courage	Courage	<i>Resolution</i>	Courage	Courage	Courage
<i>Humanity</i>	Generosity	Generosity		Generosity	Magnanimity	Generosity
Mercy	Charity	Mercy		Mercy; Compassion		Compassion
	Chastity	Purity	Chastity	Purity		Purity
Industriousness	<i>Diligence</i>		Industry			Diligence
Humor				Humor		Humor
Frugality		Frugality	Frugality			Frugality
Perseverance						Perseverance
Spiritual Authority			Tranquility			Tranquility
Dignity		Dignity				Dignity
Tenacity			Silence			Tenacity
Gravity						Gravity
Respectability				Gentleness		Gentleness
Sternness						Sternness
	Hope	Hope				Hope
	Kindness	Kindness		Politeness		Kindness
	Patience	Patience				Patience
	Charity			Love		Charity
	Faith					Faith
		Tolerance		Tolerance		Tolerance
			Cleanliness	Good faith		Good Faith
			Order			Order
				Fidelity		Fidelity
				Gratitude		Gratitude

Table 2: Comparison of Virtues

In order to properly define each virtue this section starts by adopting the definitions included in Webster's Third New International Dictionary and then furthers that explanation when it is needed.

Prudence is wisdom shown in the exercise of reason, forethought and self-control.³⁸ It also means sagacity or shrewdness in the management of affairs, and providence in the use of resources. Peter Kreeft builds on the definition by describing wisdom as the fact of understanding, of capturing the insight of the objective existing things. Kreeft's description considers prudence beyond basic intelligence.³⁹

Justice is defined as "the maintenance or administration of what is just: impartial adjustment of conflicting claims; assignment of merited rewards or punishments; just treatment to give one his due that is which is his by right."⁴⁰ Justice is intuitive and personal but also mathematical. It is an abstract or scientific thought process, based on individual views, that determines what is just, equitable, or fair.⁴¹

Humility is defined as "the quality or state of being humble in spirit; freedom from pride or arrogance."⁴² It is also the recognition that one's thoughts might not be the most appropriate when compared to others. Humility allows one to recognize and accept one's own failings and limitations.

Self-control is defined as: "control of oneself; restraint exercise over one's own impulses, emotions or desires."⁴³ This virtue does not always mean suppression or repression. Instead, it has a positive meaning by emphasizing the ability for someone to have power over oneself and to resist initial reactive responses.

Courage is "the heart as the seat of intelligence or feeling; mental or moral strength enabling one to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear or difficulty

firmly and resolutely.”⁴⁴ General W. T. Sherman is attributed with saying, “I would define true courage to be a perfect sensibility of the measure of danger and a mental willingness to endure it. Courage is not an old-fashioned virtue, or only proper to soldiers in combat, it is necessary for every daily aspect of every virtue.” In addition to physical courage, courage also includes the moral courage to express one’s thoughts and ideas when they might not be popular with those in power.

Generosity is the “liberality in spirit or act; magnanimity, benevolence; and act or instance of magnanimity or munificence.”⁴⁵ Generosity is the desire to share what one has with others, whether it be resources, knowledge, or relationships. It also recognizes the inherent dignity of every person.

Compassion is the deep feeling of and understanding of misery or suffering and the concomitant desire to promote its alleviation.⁴⁶ Peter Senge highlights the importance of compassion inside organizations, not only as an emotional state, but as the empathy that people develop when they understand the system in which they work.⁴⁷

Comparison of Attributes with Virtues

The identification of a common set of competencies for strategic leaders, and virtues commonly accepted throughout cultures sets the basis for the analysis of the relationships that virtues have with competencies. This study suggests the influence that each virtue has for each area of competency. It will subsequently propose the usefulness of each virtue related to each area of competency.

Once the cross comparison is finished, the study classifies the virtues in relationship to its role as dominant, supporting, or irrelevant. The two or three virtues that are most important to a specific area of competency are labeled as the dominant

virtues for this study. These dominant virtues are the ones that strategic leaders would need to properly identify and consider to form the basis of one's education in strategic leadership responsibilities.

Futuring

	Prudence Wisdom	Justice	Humility	Self-control Moderation Temperance	Courage Fortitude	Generosity Magnanimity Benevolence	Compassion Mercy
'Futuring'	+++ ⁴⁸ To explore the environment; to keep identity in mind; Wisdom to forge a future in an VUCA environment; to properly frame the environment; to think big and think small; to identify the vision for the organization; to establish the intent and purpose of the organization.	+ To adjust all the related people's interest towards the vision, intent and purpose of the organization.	+ To break biases; to accept reality instead of creating its own one; to recognize the weaknesses of the organization; to identify self weaknesses; to create a consensus towards the vision and adapt it; to accept historical precedents.	+ To remain focused; to avoid being too influenced; to be self determined and committed to the vision; to avoid <i>candoism</i> .	+++ To act out of comfort zone; to inspire and motivate people; to encourage winner's attitude; to keep looking at the future despite favorable or adverse circumstances; to take a stand for one's vision.	+ To look for potential value and service of the organization to the society; to look beyond economic profit	- To remain open to social needs.

Table 3: Relationships between Virtues and Futuring Competencies

Prudence will help strategic leaders to shape the future in an unclear and ambiguous environment and to identify the requirements derived for the organization. Strategic leaders need to seize main trends and ideas as well as grasp small details – thinking big and small. The result will be the identification of the intent and purpose of the organization and hence the agreement of its vision. In complex environments, prudence will also help define the problem at stake.⁴⁹ Prudence is the enabler that will be the basis of judgment throughout the processes. For example, President Lincoln's vision for his country, reflected in his grand strategy and his undertaking to achieve it, is a relevant example of prudence in facing the future. He was convinced that the states

needed to be reunited and the slavery needed to be abolished. He was able to face Congress, his party, and at times his supporters in a way that allowed him to achieve both objectives regardless of the situations he faced.⁵⁰

In order to posture the organization to succeed in the future, it is often necessary to act outside the usual patterns. For that purpose, courage helps strategic leaders to think and act beyond their usual model even if they have doubts about themselves and their organizations. The commitment to looking forward should remain constant despite favorable or adverse circumstances. Leaders also have to possess a strong willingness to venture and persevere in order to encourage positive attitudes. Hernán Cortés offered a good example of courage when he decided to burn his vessels stranding himself and his crew in America. This action demonstrated both his courage, which was necessary to strand himself, and his strong commitment to his endeavor, and echoed both his vision for the future and his strong will.⁵¹

In the stage of shaping the future and identifying the vision for the organization there is a lot of uncertainty that may detract the focus from the intent of the organization. In those processes, the virtue of self-control or temperance helps strategic leaders remain focused and avoid being overly influenced by the environment. Self-control also enables self determination and commitment to the vision. President Washington provides the example of how to remain focused while avoiding outside pressures. He managed to be self determined and committed to his vision of gaining independence for his country while refraining from following advice that could be compelling but that could eventually be detrimental to what he thought was best for the country.

Understanding the future implies the need for the leader to look at the future without biases. The leader has to rely on the result of trustworthy measuring tools used by the organization, and to recognize that he is filtering findings through his own mental preconceptions. Once the vision is adopted, humility will help forge consensus, and identify and recognize the weaknesses of the organization. Therefore, humility is a necessary requirement for effective futuring activities. One remarkable example of humility was George Washington's initial rejection of the responsibility of Commander in Chief of the Continental Army in 1775, because he felt he was not the most suitable for the position. This initial rejection contributed to his reputation as strategic leader. Understanding and incorporating lessons of history to the decision process can be a sign of humility that will help avoid making mistakes.⁵²

A socially aware leader needs to keep in mind the responsibility his organization has to the society in which he works. For that purpose, he needs to identify the potential added value that his activities can provide to society, while remaining aware of the corresponding costs. Therefore, leaders need to be generous and look beyond economic profit. There are many examples of how leaders have helped build a better society, even with their own funds and actions. For example, Bill Gates is the leader of a multinational conglomerate with more than ninety thousand employees and subsidiary companies in 112 countries, yet he feels compelled to act for the benefit of his society.⁵³

Consequently, the study determines that the dominant virtues related to futuring appear to be prudence and courage, supported by humility, self-control and generosity. However, there were fewer examples of the virtues of justice and compassion in support of the activities related to the future of the organization.

Openmindedness

Strategic leaders need to be able to integrate points of view that differ from their own. This ability requires leaders to understand and look beyond their own biases. Humility helps leaders accept their own limitations and find worth in other cultures, ideas and points of view. In many “successful” organizations, especially those without a strong culture, it is difficult to justify the need for change when everything seems to run smoothly. However, humility allows leaders to recognize the weaknesses of themselves and their organizations. Recognizing weaknesses helps leaders to accept that there might be different, more effective ways to operate. One important asset leaders have to develop is creative thinking.⁵⁴ Many organizations have indicators of change that are easily acceptable by a humble leader. Leaders have to think in two domains. They have to be aware of the current situation as well as being aware of the lessons that history helps identify, as Neustadt and May propose.⁵⁵ It is the recognition of this balance that demonstrates humility.

	Prudence Wisdom	Justice	Humility	Self-control Moderation Temperance	Courage Fortitude	Generosity Magnanimity Benevolence	Compassion Mercy
Openmindedness	+++ To accept other's point of view to its right point; to identify 2 nd and 3 rd order effects; to achieve cultural awareness; to develop and use of the ability to properly judge.	+ To give everybody his own unique merit and credit; to take into account cultural differences and act accordingly.	+++ To accept one's limitations and other's points of view without biases; to accept the need for change; to be able to modify self-perceptions; to avoid the ego trap.	+++ Not to feel attacked for other's different ideas; to understand the need for change; to keep a flexible approach to issues.	+ To accept when one is wrong; to act out of comfort zone; to mature self; to create an internal "Clash of Ideas; to accept lessons from history.	- To grant consensus despite own's ideas or preferences; to act for the organization.	- To recognize the righteousness of the team's proposals.

Table 4: Relationships between Virtues and Openmindedness Competencies

When explaining or receiving disagreement on ideas, it is likely that leaders initially feel defensive or even attacked. Self-control will prevent them from reacting to those feelings immediately and seek a way to grasp their full content for the benefit of the organization. A degree of restraint or self-control is also useful for building consensus related to the external environment. Historians suggest that General George C. Marshall was a consummate example of self-control which made him receptive to others' opinions.⁵⁶

Related to the former, leaders need to be able to grasp the full meaning of the information presented to them. That implies being able to identify its fundamental meaning and to properly relate it to the problem at hand. Prudence helps leaders to identify and understand the second and third order effects of their actions, as well as to develop and exercise the ability to judge the information properly.

The ability to create consensus among a group of people requires recognizing everybody's unique contribution or merit in the exploration of the environment. This can be achieved by exercising the virtue of justice, which will also foster closing the cultural gap between directives or between the organization and the external environment. In that sense, justice will help directives mature.

Leaders need to recognize and accept when they are wrong. The opposite behavior may lead to a personal path dependency that would leave little space for redirecting the course. This is more accentuated in hierarchical organizations with ample vertical span of authority often resulting in leaders who perceive themselves as infallible. In those situations, leaders need courage to deal with mistakes, because recognizing failures will place leaders out of their comfort zone, promoting what Colin

Powell called “the Clash of Ideas.”⁵⁷ From the organizational point of view, the Army War College provides an example of promotion of courage when it requires readings that take a critical perspective of the American posture and force students to think outside what might be their normal thought processes.⁵⁸

Generosity is needed in order to keep the organization in mind, despite personal interests, and to reach consensus. Compassion will also help to build consensus by allowing the leader to recognizing the proposals from the team are correct.

In summary, it appears that humility and self-control are dominant virtues for openmindedness. Both are connected and help the leader to accept what he needs to know no matter how hard the process or how different the information is from his thoughts. Prudence also dominates as the basis for judgment when leaders read and interpret the environment. The supporting virtues of courage, and justice complement humility, self-control and prudence by opening the leader’s mind to accept when his perspective might be wrong and to recognize the extent to which his team may be right. Generosity and compassion have less influence.

Influence

In order to influence appropriately, leaders need to communicate, negotiate and build consensus, leading by example when required. Self-control facilitates proper communication and effective negotiation. Negotiation manuals emphasize the need to master oneself in order to cope with those situations. This is particularly important at the strategic level, where decisions often involve significant resources and where leaders need to remain calm to properly address the issues and communicate them efficiently. Madeleine Albright calls the “art of persuasion - the ability that the President of the United States has to exercise effective communication skills.”⁵⁹

	Prudence Wisdom	Justice	Humility	Self-control Moderation Temperance	Courage Fortitude	Generosity Magnanimity Benevolence	Compassion Mercy
Influence	+++ To influence to the right point; to encourage team building; to build camaraderie; to create collaboration environments; to foster talent in the team; to develop trust; to promote accountability; to set structures that help influence.	+ To influence by just rewarding; to set performance standards; to orient people towards the organization; to encourage socializing as well as to individualize.	++ To mature as leader; to allow self to be influenced; to properly recognize climate and encourage its improvement; to handle losing periods; to recognize faults in the organization.	+++ To effectively communicate and negotiate; to provide confidence; to get the team supporting the leader; to promote cooperation; to properly articulate communication.	++ To act in difficult scenarios; to communicate the truth especially upward; to encourage winner's attitude; to encourage subordinates' accountability; to leverage technology; to speed communication.	+ To include everybody; to focus on the organization instead of one's self.	+ To build consensus; to lead by example; to avoid imposing our own views.

Table 5: Relationships between Virtues and Influence Competencies

Leaders need to evolve and mature as strategic leaders but cannot do so by themselves alone. Humility is important because leaders must accept feedback from their subordinates and from their peers and superiors. For that purpose, they should be open to influence and receptive to information about their own perspectives and their leadership. They have to keep in mind the climate of the organization and encourage its improvement. Strategic leaders sit in the highest positions of their organizations, where egos tend to grow and subordinates can easily become “yes men.” Therefore, leaders need to remain aware of that possibility and be able to recognize faults in the organization to improve it. Leaders need to be able to manage periods in which their organizations experience difficulties and keep improving their teams during winning phases. As Admiral Mullen emphasized, humility is needed to listen more, one of the essential attributes for leaders to receive unfiltered information.⁶⁰

Consequently, when strategic leaders realize the potential power they have, prudence will help them determine whether their actions are to gain personal recognition for themselves (personalized power) or to acquire resources or prestige that benefit the organization at large. Prudence will facilitate leaders to understand the point at which influence is useful for the organization and the limits that should not be trespassed. Therefore, leaders create a collaborative environment in which trust between people is emphasized and fostered, and accountability is promoted across the organization. Prudence will also help foster talent in the organization, by means of setting structures that help open communication channels to and from the outside environment.

Justice will help exercise positive influence by justly rewarding team members; by setting performance standards; by orienting people towards the effort of the organization; or by encouraging collective behavior and individual performances. Moreover, it suggests that recognition is just and fair for all members of the team.

Courage will help to deal with difficult environments and tough scenarios. Leaders need to keep looking at the future no matter how favorable or adverse the current circumstances are. Courage will help leaders encourage and develop accountability.⁶¹ For the communication to be effective it should be based on truth, and therefore leaders need courage to communicate the truth. An example that illustrates this virtue is when General Keane in 2006 saw that US strategy in Iraq was not working and felt compelled to speak out. He spoke to the Secretary of Defense and eventually to the Commander in Chief.⁶² Leaders also need to live their message in order to lead by example. John Baldoni emphasizes how Mother Theresa lived her message and used

her courage; these were among the reasons behind the achievement of world influence.⁶³

Leaders need to keep in mind that their most important assets are the people working with them. There is a tendency to direct communication and influence efforts towards individuals that are most effective in their use of time and resources. Strategic leaders have to resort to generosity to include as many subordinates as possible in their developmental efforts and foster behaviors that focus on collective performances.

Strategic leaders work at a level in which there is a risk of forgetting the importance of men and women as human beings. In those environments leaders need to build consensus and lead by example in order to include all their employees in the effort. For that purpose, they need compassion to keep in mind the needs of their people, while avoiding imposing their views. An organization that traditionally strives for compassion is the Army, in which leaders at all levels recognize the need to be aware of their subordinates' issues and make every effort to solve them.

Influence is a key area of competency for strategic leaders. Influence makes the leader feel so powerful that he needs prudence and self-control as dominant virtues to influence to the point that is fair or just. In order to complement the limits of the influence to the appropriate degree while avoiding manipulation, influence has to be supported by courage, justice, humility, generosity, and to a lesser degree, compassion.

Human Development

Strategic leaders need to develop their talents and the attributes of their team members and their organizations as a whole. They have to remain aware of the importance of educating their people on the particularities of the strategic environment, and to evaluate their teams properly. Justice will help them provide the appropriate and

equitable means to educate their teams. Justice will also help them evaluate each subordinate by his own merits, without being influenced by other parameters outside the performance appraisal. Furthermore, justice will promote balancing team work with the respect of individuals. In many occasions creativity comes from individual and isolated work.⁶⁴ A good example is the case of Steve Wozniak, the inventor of the personal computer, who came up with the first development of his invention after enough time working alone.⁶⁵

	Prudence Wisdom	Justice	Humility	Self-control Moderation Temperance	Courage Fortitude	Generosity Magnanimity Benevolence	Compassion Mercy
Human development	++ To perceive when to educate; to develop members in order to achieve excellence; to keep asking for feed-back to the appropriate people; to build teams; to develop resilience; to build learning organizations; to be a model; to prepare self for loneliness	+++ To provide equitable means to develop members of the organization; to evaluate w justice; to fairly complete performance appraisals; to discriminate between subordinates; to promote and reward creativity.	+ To understand one's need for improvement; to increase Self-Awareness; to increase self-determination; to train how to manage winner periods	+ To increase self development; to avoid overconfidence; to increase self-discipline; to foster creativity in the organization; to avoid imposing personal mastering; to create climate of self growing; to develop self emotionally.	+++ To properly accomplish personnel evaluations; to select the right people regardless of other's influences; to reverse inappropriate behaviors; to keep questioning own ideas; to solve the creative tension between vision and current reality.	++ To foster corporate responsibility to develop men; to teach; mentor; and coach; to foster talent in the team; to encourage fidelity to the organization; to lengthen personnel's tenure in the organization.	++ To develop & encourage empathy; to reinforce good behaviors; to develop trust.

Table 6: Relationships between Virtues and Human Development Competencies

Evaluations are relevant at the strategic level. However, objective evaluation can be influenced by a trend to create relationships between mentors and protégés. When properly established, these relationships can have positive benefits for all involved.

However, leaders have to remain aware of the risks entailed. It is necessary to have courage to properly evaluate and to support the established selection system of the organization. Courage is also necessary to select the right people regardless of pressures from outside of the organization. Courage is required to reverse inappropriate behavior in the organization and to continue questioning human development systems in order to optimize them and to encourage team members to remain life-long learners. One of the ways to do this is to keep questioning one's ideas. According to Bill George, to have the capacity to inspire and empower others, first we must be willing to devote ourselves to our personal growth and development as leaders.⁶⁶ Courage will also help leaders solve the creative tension between their vision and the limits that reality sets.

At the top level of the organization, it is important to perceive the aspects in which each member of the team needs to improve his education, which is often compromised by the intense activity performed by high level executives. Prudence will help leaders ask for advice on the specific educational needs of their people and foster their fulfillment. Leaders have to find all available ways to build teams and to develop resilience in them. For that purpose, Senge expressed the idea pointedly when he said that "the core leadership strategy is simple: be a model."⁶⁷ He also suggests that to achieve the goal of corporate excellence is essential to the total development of the components of an organization.⁶⁸

Senior leaders occupy positions in which it is especially important to embrace humility. Their selection to the highest levels in an organization recognizes their performance and capabilities. However, they must also understand that they need to be life-long learners and thereby continuously improve capacities by means of study and

education. There are many examples of life-long learners among top American political figures, like President Lincoln. Humility will also help leaders be open to enhanced self-awareness which is the foundation for one's own development and the start for the development of the team.⁶⁹ Humility will help leaders to put success in proper perspective so that they are better prepared to respond to periods of decline or failure. An honest self-evaluation also helps manage the selection process of the senior leader's team. A noteworthy example of selection of personnel is General Marshall as Secretary of State, when he selected five people that would later occupy relevant positions in their country. Together with Marshall, they came to be known as the Six Wise Men. General Marshall's passion for education and team work fostered the improvement of his team, and allowed him to develop himself by his team.⁷⁰

The development of a senior leader team often involves the investment of significant time and resources. In many cases, educating their people will entail an extra load for the leaders, who therefore have to be generous with their time, skills, and resources to help others. Education is a duty that will pay big dividends in the long term. Subordinate leaders will be better educated and more loyal to the organization because leaders within that organization invested in them. These actions will encourage fidelity to the organization, lengthening the stay of the subordinates and dissuading them from moving outside it. Leaders have to foster talent in the team and have to spend the required time to mentor, teach and coach.

Once strategic leaders identify the need to improve their own education, they must commit themselves to a developmental program. Leaders will need a large degree of self-control to foster the fulfillment of the education program by both themselves and

by their subordinate team members. Senior leaders should avoid overconfidence and increase self-discipline. Senge emphasizes that no one can be forced to develop his or her own personal mastery, and organizations risk becoming too aggressive in promoting personal mastery for their members. They should, instead, promote a climate in which the principles of personal mastery are practiced in daily life.⁷¹

Human development will be supported by the virtue of compassion, which will help develop and encourage empathy. Compassion will seek good behaviors and performances in order to encourage them and will develop trust among the members and between the members and the organization.

Some authors believe that the development of subordinates is the principle task of senior leaders.⁷² Harvard follows that rationale when he proposes that true leaders are leaders of leaders.⁷³ This undertaking is essential within the Armed Forces due to the limited time leaders spend in their positions. Therefore, in order to improve the development and evaluation of their teams and individuals, as well as their own development, strategic leaders have to foster justice and courage as dominant virtues, and promote prudence, humility, self-control, generosity and compassion as supporting ones.

Management Attributes

Strategic leaders will need to exert these virtues in order to achieve and put into effect the management attributes required by their positions. In order to make the right decisions and act fairly both internally and externally, they need a well developed sense of justice, which will help them empower their teams with the level of authority they deserve while establishing performance controls. Justice would also help them evaluate individual and corporate results. Strategic leaders always have to keep in mind

shareholders in order to foster their interests, in the case of private organizations, or the well being of citizens in the case of public ones.⁷⁴

	Prudence Wisdom	Justice	Humility	Self-control Moderation Temperance	Courage Fortitude	Generosity Magnanimity Benevolence	Compas- sion Mercy
Management	+++ To take the right decisions; to do strategic plans; to raise levels of performance; to encourage good behaviors; to have unity of effort; to encourage act on people's ideas; To orient to results; to streamline the organization; to manage creative tension vs. emotional tension.	+++ To take the right decisions; to act with fairness, both internally and externally; to empower people; to organize controls; to properly evaluate individual and corporate results; to keep in mind stakeholders.	++ To recognize gaps in management competencies and ask for support; to build confidence; to avoid false complacency; to manage triumphant halo; to manage winning periods.	++ To keep the mood; to improve climate and lead unemotionally; to deal with impolite people or hard situations; to deliver on the purpose of the organization; to limit direct control to his sphere of control; to delegate; to avoid groupthink.	+++ To accept responsibility; to take the appropriate decisions no matter how tough they are; to deal with change; to manage losing periods; to promote hard work; to create resilient organizations; to sustain success; to reverse failure; to streamline the structure of the organization; to delegate.	++ To proper manage and negotiate; to employ resources responsibly while sharing benefits equitably.	+ To forgive of other's mistakes; to help people with poor performances; to look beyond performance; to keep in mind social responsibility.

Table 7: Relationships between Virtues and Management Competencies

Prudence is vital to the exercise of management functions; such as making the right decisions, especially in the strategic planning of an organization. It also assists in raising the levels of performance and in encouraging appropriate behaviors. Unity of effort should also be remembered while encouraging individuals to act on their own ideas. Prudence will be also useful to orient the organization to results and, finally, to streamline the organization in order to maximize the use of available resources. In her article “*What do we need to know about wisdom?*” Jennifer Rowley suggests that wisdom, or prudence is essential to manage the knowledge of the organizations.⁷⁵

One of the basic functions of strategic leaders is to make decisions, which usually implies being able to reconcile competing desires of subordinate staff. Apart from the former virtues, courage would be relevant when decisions involve difficult choices. Strategic leaders in today's governments face these kinds of decisions on a daily basis, such as adapting the financial situations of their organizations to the current economic situation. Those decisions cascade down to departments and from there down to branches within the company. Leaders also have to resort to courage to deal with change, to manage periods of loss, to promote hard work, and to create resilient organizations. During periods of success, leaders need to sustain the momentum, and in periods of decline, they need courage to reverse failures, and to make the required decisions to face the problem.

Generosity will help leaders negotiate and employ resources responsibly. It will also help them make decisions about the allocation of benefits of the organization in order to share these profits equitably.

Self-control will facilitate exercising management functions by helping leaders to lead unemotionally, to remain level-headed regardless of the circumstances, to deal with people in difficult situations, and consequently to improve the climate of the organization. Further, it will help avoid micromanaging at lower levels and will align the effort of directives toward the purpose of the organization. It will also be necessary to avoid the effects of groupthink, especially in times of pressure or stress.⁷⁶

One of the key elements of modern management is teamwork. When properly managed, the dynamic of the group produces outcomes greater than the sum of the work of its components. To properly handle team work, leaders need to be humble to

recognize every member of the team, including themselves, need support and need to be willing to ask for it. Humility will help them recognize good ideas from the team members, build confidence, avoid complacency, and also properly manage periods of success.

Compassion is also important to team work. Leaders need to forgive mistakes of their subordinates and understand their limitations, and help them in periods of poor performance.⁷⁷ Leaders need to remain vigilant about the social effects of their organizations and cognizant of the social responsibility that the organization and its leadership imply and keep in mind the well-being of each person. As with private sector leaders, public-sector leaders need to add value for the society in which they live and seek efficiency.

Management is a broad function, yet critical for effective senior leaders. Given this perspective, the dominant virtues for management could be prudence, self-control, justice, and generosity. Supporting virtues could be humility, courage and compassion.

Discussion

Despite cultural differences, some virtues are universal. Sun Tzu, more than twenty-four centuries ago identified the qualities of command, as “wisdom, sincerity, humanity, courage and strictness.”⁷⁸ All of these are included in the category of virtues discussed above. The supreme requirements of generalship are also included in today’s categories of cognitive factors and strategic skills.

Also twenty-four centuries ago, and most probably without any relationship to the Chinese strategist, Plato defined the four virtues “that accomplish the four general ways of human behavior: the practical determination of good (prudence); its accomplishment in a society (justice); the firmness to defend it or to conquer it (fortitude) and the

moderation to avoid mixing it with the pleasure (temperance).” Both thinkers coincided with the proverbial saying that stressed the need for the repetition of acts that focus on a virtuous end: “the one who repeats acts harvests habits, and the one who repeats habits harvests his self character.”⁷⁹

Between the strategist and today’s thinkers there is a continuum of authors who emphasized the need to focus on virtues in order to achieve personal character. For instance, Carl Von Clausewitz stressed the importance of having the two kinds of qualities in order to deal with uncertainty: “an intellect (...) and the courage to follow this faint light.”⁸⁰ His message remains valid today: Courage represents personal character; and intellect represents cognitive skills. Together with technical skills they still represent the basic resources required to lead an organization. It is not coincidence that even Thucydides emphasized the need for the three aspects, as noted earlier: rank, ability and known integrity.

Based on the mentioned historical examples, the study of competencies and virtues is not a rhetorical exercise. This study suggests that virtues remain the enablers for the competencies of strategic leaders, as they have been since the times of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz. Today, the environment in which strategic leaders work is labeled as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA). As such, it can be compared to what Sun Tzu defines as the environment for generals or Clausewitz defines as friction of war.⁸¹ Consequently, most of the parameters that generals have to take into account today were present before, perhaps in a lesser degree of intensity. In any case, strategic leaders need to focus on the same type of characteristics to deal with their responsibilities.

Virtues. Having shown the historical continuity of the characteristics needed, the study incorporates the results of the comparison between the relative importance of each virtue to strategic leadership responsibilities. The analysis of the data from the former section suggests that the three most important virtues across all senior leader responsibilities are prudence, self-control, and courage.

	Prudence Wisdom	Justice	Humility	Self-control Moderation Temperance	Courage Fortitude	Generosity, Magnanimity Benevolence	Compassion Mercy
Futuring	+++ ⁸²	-	+	+	+++	+	-
Open- mindedness	+++	+	+++	+++	+	-	-
Influence	+++	+	++	+++	++	+	+
Human development	++	+++	+	+	+++	++	++
Management	+++	+++	++	+++	+++	+	+

Table 8: Summary of the Relationships between Virtues and Strategic Leader Competencies.

Prudence represents sagacity and wisdom, in its origin it represents “the art of choosing right in each case.”⁸³ It is dominant in four areas of competency: futuring; open-mindedness; influence; and management; and it heavily supports human development.

The importance of self-control, also called moderation or temperance, is emphasized at the strategic level due to the nature of the dialogue and debate that is inherent in the environment in which strategic leaders work: the higher level of responsibilities; and the sophistication of people with whom they interact (usually more educated, open-minded, and skilled). In an effective climate, the senior leaders’ ideas

will be challenged and critiqued. Self-control is therefore a requirement *sine qua non* for the different tasks leaders have to perform at the highest levels of the organizations.

Courage is dominant for futuring and human development, where leaders have to challenge themselves and support others. Especially because of the broad implications of strategic decision making, senior leaders must try to act not on beliefs or opinions, but on truths. Articulation of those truths to superiors and peers can be extremely difficult. Therefore, this paper deals primarily with moral courage and not necessarily with the physical aspects of the virtue.

While the other virtues are less important across all of the behaviors, they still have implication for selected responsibilities. Justice is dominant in the two areas that are more oriented to administration: human development and management, and is less powerful in openmindedness and influence.

Humility is only dominant in openmindedness but it significantly supports all the remaining areas of competency. It is a virtue that will always make a distinction in the leader who exercises it, and its lack will be noticed and affect the leader's behavior.

Generosity is dominant only in the management area and less supporting in the rest. As in the case of humility, lacking generosity would be noticed and the behavior of the leader would be clearly affected, especially in his relationship with his team.

Compassion appears to be the least influential of the studied virtues. While compassion supports human development, it is less relevant for management and influence and does not have a supporting role for futuring and openmindedness. The smaller level of influence of compassion does not mean, however, that it lacks relevance. Conversely, the absence of compassion in leaders would probably imply a

lack of empathy and consideration for social responsibility, and it might reveal itself in attributing to toxic leadership. Recent studies reveal that what origins toxic leadership is not what leaders do but the lack of the virtues that they display in their everyday behavior.⁸⁴ The possibility to detect toxicity in leaders by means of their lack of virtues would be a useful starting point to either improve them by exercising virtues or to avoid these leaders held strategic leadership positions. Toxic and negative leadership is an area of study gaining wider acceptance in leadership research.⁸⁵

Competencies. Table 8 shows that every strategic leader competency depends on at least one underlying virtue. Some of those competencies, though, have a greater foundation in virtues than do others. Looking at the comparison from the areas of competency, the study indicates that the area that depends on the contribution of more virtues is management, followed by human development and influence. These are precisely the areas that necessitate a bigger amount of time for leaders at lower levels, and tend to be more related to emotional intelligence.

Whether the leader focuses inward the organization or outward, futuring and openmindedness are the competencies that generally focus toward the outside. They involve the most complex cognitive assets and reason and intuition act together to achieve them. The study has found that they are influenced by a smaller number of virtues: prudence, humility, courage, and self-control are common to both. These four can be the four virtues that would help leaders to better identify the trends and to appropriately perceive and incorporate external factors.

One of the areas of competencies, influence, is directed both towards the outside and also the inside, and all levels of management have to pursue it. Influence is a key

element of leaders because communication will help them receive and transmit, and therefore influence the target audiences.

Considering the areas of competency with a focus toward inside the organization -human development and management- the study finds that the most influential virtues are prudence, self-control and justice, followed by generosity and courage, and then humility and compassion.

From the cross analysis of virtues and competencies, this work demonstrates the influence that virtues have in the execution of strategic leadership competencies. The lack of any important virtue will affect the effectiveness of the leader in the fulfillment of the required competencies.

Consequences. This study proposes that in order to become better leaders, people have to evaluate themselves with regard to where they stand regarding the virtues, as suggested by Glanz.⁸⁶ This research demonstrates the relationship that virtues have with the significant areas of competency required of strategic leaders. The study assumes that leaders will desire to increase their level of performance – ethical and therefore professional – and then proposes that this increase is achieved by exercising and fomenting virtues.

Although it is suggested by modern psychology that the most suitable time to start developing virtues is during childhood, this study agrees with Havard that self improvement is possible at any time during one's life.⁸⁷ Because character is the basis of leadership, this paper suggests that senior leader development institutions should consider the education of senior leaders in virtues as part of their curriculum and throughout their careers.

The US Army War College (USAWC) defines its desired output as graduates who are, among other things: adaptive to new ideas; critical thinkers that are self-aware and culturally astute; possessive of sound strategic judgment; competent at operating with a global mindset; able to build teams; and skilled communicators.⁸⁸ This study has demonstrated that virtues are relevant for all the mentioned areas, and hence the model seems to be valid for a practical use.

Because the USAWC is a unique opportunity to improve leadership, this study suggests that a program to develop character might be adopted. If the need to implement such a program for senior leaders is agreed upon, modern education provides several examples of programs to achieve these ends. One of the best ways to develop character is by exercising virtues, and there are many ways to develop virtues. For example, western civilization has relied on the science of aretology for centuries.⁸⁹

Another conclusion departs from the study on congruence between leader-follower values as discussed by Haybor.⁹⁰ Leaders, according to Haybor, tend to be regarded as charismatic when they share values with followers. Expanding the rationale, leaders would tend to be regarded as charismatic when they share the same virtues. These senior leaders would also tend to compose teams with people that share with them the same virtues, and thereby reinforcing their charismatic role and their influence.

These conclusions might lead one to believe that leaders will have more likelihood of clashing with others that lack the same type of virtues and will be more comfortable with those sharing the same virtues. However, this suggestion requires further empirical study. This future work further implies the possibility of properly

identifying and measuring virtues in leaders and is linked to the first proposal related to the capability for self-evaluation.

Future research

The future study of the relationship between virtues and leadership competencies at strategic level is unbounded. The limited scope of this study prevents the development of these ideas in detail. However, if educating in virtues is worth considering, future research might consider some of the following ideas.

The most relevant consequence proposed is to focus education to inculcate values through the exercise of virtues. In that way, leaders will be focused on becoming virtuous and by acknowledging the importance of achieving virtues they will also provide an example of a way that their subordinates can follow.

The identification of virtues as well as the awareness of the virtues which are required for strategic leaders could be of particular relevance to the selection of leaders for high level positions. Additionally, the virtues can be the basis for their continuous development once assigned to such positions.

The model can also help in the identification of signs, causes, and effects of improper habits and poor development of competencies. Once misbehaviors are identified, it will help to recommend specific virtues in which to take action to become more effective leaders. Consequently, there needs to be a system to evaluate virtues in leaders. In order to help identify whether a leader lacks any of the required virtues, it is suggested that small adjustments be made to the US Army 360 Assessment System so that a minimum level of each virtue could be assessed. For instance, Gene Klann proposes a checklist of virtuous leader behavior that could be a useful starting point.⁹¹

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of the recognition of virtues and values for members of a command team. Whether those virtues should be aligned or have some “misalignment” (that causes friction or tension) is beyond the scope of this study. However, the impact of such tension should be the focus of future research.

The use of virtues also prepares leaders in the Armed Forces to exercise the kind of leadership of Mission Command, adopted in the US Army and Marine Corps. Virtues will help leaders to identify the purposes of their commanders and then lead their units in the most suitable way to achieve the intent.

This study has demonstrated the direct influence of virtues in executives’ behavior. For this purpose seven virtues common to most of cultures were selected. Further analysis is required to adapt the model to each culture by applying a greater number of the specific virtues for that culture. That adapted study will provide conclusions more uniquely suited for strategic leaders of a particular culture.

Finally, this paper has provided greater aspects of components that underlie a leader’s behavior. Character, virtues, personality, intelligence, motivation, and skills all form the basis of a leader’s behavior. Further research that investigates the linkages between these aspects is needed to better understand the basis of behavior.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the relationship between virtues and the unique responsibilities of strategic leadership. The intent of the paper is to suggest that virtues provide a necessary and central foundation in order to exercise the strategic leader responsibilities. Virtues define personal character, and character is the basis from which strategic leaders will develop and incorporate the specific

cognitive, interpersonal, and technical skills that are required for leaders holding senior positions within organizations.

The work that strategic leaders accomplish is often defined by what they do – the tasks that are reflected in their competencies. As this study has shown, a focus on competencies is incomplete. The way strategic leaders behave is better defined by who they are: their virtues and their character. Therefore, this paper suggests that virtues are the main characteristics that define a person, and competencies should be considered the main attributes that define the responsibilities of a position.

The study has demonstrated the direct relationship that virtues have in order to effectively carry out competencies. While there are inexhaustible lists of virtues, the methodology in the present research simplified the number of virtues to the seven widely accepted ones. This paper also suggested that virtues for strategic leaders are not different than those for organizational or direct leaders. Nonetheless, the study suggests that the specific level and situations in which strategic leaders have to work imply differences in the intensity of the application of some of the virtues in order to perform the competencies that are specific to the senior level.

In order to achieve more effective teams, it is suggested that strategic leaders need to remain focused on their own improvement and on the improvement of their immediate subordinates. The current trend seems to focus on results instead of focusing on inherent team values. This study proposes that leaders might find it useful to focus on virtues because virtues would be the basis for the team's values. Additionally, because virtues provide a justification for flexibility of a leader's actions, a

perspective based on virtues will allow the leader to adapt themselves and the organization to meet the changing nature of the external environment.

From the military point of view, the study also recognizes that some armies in the world already focus on the education of virtues. Many military academies emphasize virtues and values from the first moments of one's military career. Cadets are encouraged toward actions that foster virtues and develop character. The study builds on this education to suggest that it could be of utility to use virtues as a means to develop the leaders at every level.

If the recommendations above are implemented, what might be different from the way education is fulfilled today? This paper suggests that the answer is only a change of focus, considering the same aspects with a different lens. As virtues have been the focal point for the education of leaders for centuries there is no point in avoiding their usefulness today. The core of strategic leadership is to lead teams at the highest level of the organization, and it implies personal commitment and trust. Explicit development of virtues allows one to integrate what most often provides the greatest individual conflict: aligning one's private life with one's professional responsibilities. As this study suggests, there is no better way to achieve the congruence implied on those positions than by enhancing the education on virtues of strategic leaders.

This study suggests that virtues are the foundation of character and of trust, essential elements for personal maturity and performance. Leaders with virtues that support long term organizational success will be in a better position to lead teams to the utmost. Virtues have been the basis of education of leaders for centuries. Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Alexander the Great, The Great Captain, Napoleon, Washington, and

Marshall alike stressed the importance of virtues and character to lead. This study suggests that virtues are, and will remain, the root of strategic leaders' achievement.

Endnotes

¹ Robert B. Strassler, ed., Thucydides. *The Landmark. A comprehensive guide to the Peloponnesian war* (New York, NY, Free Press, 1996), 127.

² The VUCA environment is not only proper to strategic leaders, but due to the kind of their responsibilities they are more influenced by it. As they have more interactions with outside world, their abilities to interact with the environment increases dramatically over the requirements for those working at lower levels. For the purposes of this work, the strategic level is the third level of an organizational framework whose lower level is *direct* leadership, working at team or unit perspective; the second one is the *organizational* level, with perspective oriented towards the organizational systems and processes; and the third one is the *strategic* level that has a global or national perspective. This structure of leadership framework is suggested in *Strategic Leadership, The General's Art*, (Vienna, VA, Management Concepts, 2009), chapter one, and *Creating a Culture of Leadership Development*, by George E. Reed, page 8.

³ Sydney Finklestein, Donald C. Hambrick, Albert A. Cannella Jr. *Strategic leadership. Theory and Research on Executives, Top Management Teams, and Boards* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009): 11. They included as strategic leaders: CEOs, division managers, top management teams, and boards of directors. The US Army has a less restrictive conception of strategic leaders, and it has 600 authorized positions designated for strategic leaders (FM 6-22, Strategic Leadership). Considering Active Duty, Army Reserve and Army National Guard, military and civilians, there are about one million two hundred thousand members, and then the relationship would be one strategic leadership position for about twelve thousand members of the "big" Army.

⁴ Finklestein, Hambrick et Cannella, *Strategic leadership, Theory and Research on Executives, Top Management Teams, and Boards*, 52-59.

⁵ Considering the number of authorized strategic posts for the US Army of 600, there would be one for each ten to thirteen thousand men. For a country with an Army of 80 to 100.000, like the bigger armies in Europe, and using that ratio, there would be from 8 to 10 strategic leaders, which can be a starting number to plan. With that figure, and considering the need of 3 to 5 supporting officers working for them, that makes a figure between 30 to 50 O-6 and O-7 (OF-5 and OF-6 in NATO) with strategic level awareness required at permanence in those armies.

⁶ Finklestein, Hambrick and Cannella, *Strategic leadership, Theory and Research on Executives, Top Management Teams, and Boards*, 52.

⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁸ FM 6-22 *Army Leadership*, (October 2006), 2-4.

⁹ Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue* (San Francisco, CA, Ignatius Press, 1992): 68. Plato identifies four cardinal (*carde*: hinge) virtues: justice, wisdom, courage and moderation.

¹⁰ Alexandre Havard. *Virtuous Leadership. An Agenda for Personal Excellence* (Scepter Publishers, Inc, 2007): XV.

¹¹ Alexandre Havard, author of *Virtuous Leadership*, telephone interview from Moscow by author, March 18th, 2012. Reproduced with Mr. Havard's permission.

¹² FM 6-22 *Army Leadership*, 2-4.

¹³ There are an increasing number of successful strategic leaders that are women. For simplicity this paper uses masculine pronouns.

¹⁴ For the purposes of this paper, the starting point of the issue is Mintzberg.

¹⁵ Stephen Gerras, ed., *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 3 ed. (US Army War College, 2010): 28.

¹⁶ John Briscoe and Douglas T. Hall, *Grooming and Picking Leaders Using Competency Frameworks: Do they work? An Alternative Approach and New Guidelines for Practice*. *Organizational Dynamics*, no. 37 (Autumn 1999): 48-49. For their recommendations to help companies improve their executive competency applications: 50-51.

¹⁷ Henry Mintzberg. *The nature of managerial work* (New York, NY, Harper and Row, 1973).

¹⁸ Briscoe and Hall, *Grooming and Picking Leaders Using Competency Frameworks: Do they work? An Alternative Approach and New Guidelines for Practice*.

¹⁹ R. Duane Ireland and Michael A. Hitt, *Achieving and maintaining strategic competitiveness in the 21st century: the role of strategic leadership* (USAWC AY 12 Strategic Leadership Course, Selected readings): 1-15.

²⁰ Leonard Wong et al, "Strategic Leadership Competencies". Army War College, 2003. Manuscript unpublished.

²¹ Gerras, *Strategic Leadership Primer*.

²² FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*.

²³ John M. Brison. *Strategic Planning for public and nonprofit organizations. A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA, Jossey Bass , 2004): 123-152.

²⁴ Cited in Admiral James G. Stavridis *Strategic Communication and National Security*, Quadrennial Defense Review no. 46 (3rd quarter 2007): 4.

²⁵ Gene Klann, *Building character. Strengthening the heart of Good Leadership*, (San Francisco, CA, John Wiley Sons, Inc, 2007): 5. He stresses through several examples that "to lead is to influence (...) others for the best". According to Klann, "management deals with

planning, designing, controlling, coordinating and tracking execution”, and leadership is about “motivating, inspiring, encouraging, and influencing”. This paper incorporates his idea of leading as influence, but in a broader sense, as it includes motivating, inspiring, encouraging and communicating.

²⁶ Briscoe and Hall, 48. They suggest to accomplish it by becoming aware of the need for new competencies; knowing how to develop those competencies by himself; transferring the learning to other executives; and institutionalizing learning in a continuous learning approach.

²⁷ Webster’s Third New International Dictionary. (Springfield, Massachusetts, Merriam-Webster Inc, Publishers, 1986): 2530-2531

²⁸ 10th definition of: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/value> (accessed Jan 15 2012).

²⁹ Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, p. 2556. Other definitions included are: 3. A particular beneficial quality or efficacy in something. 4. Manly strength or courage. 5. A characteristic, quality or trait known or felt to be excellent. 6. An active quality or power whether of physical or of moral nature; the capacity or power adequate to the production of a given effect. This paper will adopt the first one as the working definition for virtue.

³⁰ 6th definition at Dictionnary.com., <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/virtue?s=t> (accessed Jan 15 2012).

³¹ Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*; Havard, *Virtuous Leadership*.

³² Aristotle.

³³ Robert Turknett, Lyn Turknett, and Chris McCusker, “Going First and Being Followed: Leading with Knowledge and Integrity”, Good Business, The Journal of The Southern Institute for Business and Professional Ethics (Summer 2004), page 3. Available at: http://www.turknett.com/sectionR/documents/GoingFirstandBeingFollowedLeadingwithKnowledgeandIntegrity_000.pdf, accessed 20 Jan 2012.

³⁴ Andre Comte-Sponville. *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues* (New York, NY, Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, LLC, translation 2001).

³⁵ FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*.

³⁶ This work grants credit to BG. Arvind Thakur (India) for his insights about Hinduism, specifically about the relationships of virtues.

³⁷ This work grants credit to Mr. Jose Diaz for the idea of the differences across cultures in degree of influence that any given virtue may have, and hence the degree of influence of each virtue within each culture has to be the object of further study.

³⁸ Websters’ Third New International Dictionary, 1828.

³⁹ Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 65-66.

⁴⁰ Websters’ Third New International Dictionary, 1228.

⁴¹ Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 66.

⁴² Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1101.

⁴³ Ibid., 2059.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 522.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 945.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 462

⁴⁷ Peter M. Senge. *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. (New York, NY, 2006. Doubleday Ed. Random House): 160-161.

⁴⁸ The importance of each virtue to each area of competency is stressed, in the top of each cell, with a minus sign +/- when the virtue is of little relevance, and with a number of plus signs +/- indicating the relative importance (not absolute value) of each virtue to the area of competency.

⁴⁹ Diane F. Halpern, *Thought and Knowledge. An Introduction to Critical Thinking* (London, UK, Psychology Press, 2002), 405.

⁵⁰ James M. McPherson, *Tried by War. Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2009) p 235, that explains the letter "To whom it may concern" stating his strategy and willingness to achieve it at moments of political confusion and elicit Confederacy's unacceptable counteroffer.

⁵¹ Luis Alejandro Palacio and Alexandra Cortés, "Never retreat, never surrender: the bargaining power of commitment in the hawk-dove game": 1 Available at: <http://www.ugr.es/~pbgrte/palacio.pdf> (accessed Jan 15, 2012)

⁵² Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time. The uses of history for decision makers*, (New York, NY, Free Press, 1988).

⁵³ http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/inside_ms.msp, accessed 1 March 2012. The exact figure is 92,303

⁵⁴ Charles D. Allen, "Creative thinking for individuals and teams" US Army War College, Strategic Thinking Core Curriculum Selected Readings, 2010.

⁵⁵ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*. Throughout their book they propose many useful examples to think about the way strategic leaders and their teams worked.

⁵⁶ Mark A. Stoller. *George C, Marshall: Soldier and Statecraft of the American Century*. (New York, NY. Simon & Shuster Macmillan):156

⁵⁷ Oren Harari, *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell* (New York, NY, McGraw Hill, 2002). p. 51

⁵⁸ Among the books and countless articles from specialized journals that form the basis of the first semester of the US Army War College curriculum, at least half of them use critical thinking that often includes a critical thinking view of American's policy or activities. It is a remarkable form of institutional courage, that takes students out of their sphere of confidence and helps develop their critical thinking skills as well as create rationale for their endeavors. A synthesis of the AWC process to develop critical thinking can be found at: Douglas E. Waters, "Understanding Strategic Thinking and Developing Strategic Thinkers", Joint Forces Quarterly no. 63, (4th Quarter 2011): 113-119

⁵⁹ Madeleine Albright, *Memo to the President Elect* (New York, NY. Harper Collins Publishers, 2008), Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ Michael G. Mullen. "Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics". JFQ no 55 (4th quarter, 2009): 4. Admiral Mullen emphasized that our actions speak louder than our words and that only our actions will provide the credibility necessary to communicate effectively.

⁶¹ U.S. Department of Defense. *Armed Forces Officer*, (National Defense University Press and Potomac Books, 2007), 62.

⁶² Linda Robinson, *Tell me how this war ends. General David Petraeus and the search for a way out in Iraq*. (New York, NY, Public Affairs, 2008), 30-33. Gen Keane concluded that "he had to speak out even though it meant that he speak out against his fellow officers and his friends, and taking on Rumsfeld". That constitutes a remarkable example of courage. His position would be key to the surge in Iraq and would facilitate the changing of strategy.

⁶³ John Baldoni. *Great Communication Secrets of Great Leaders*. (New York, NY, McGraw Hill, 2003): 137. The author analyzes the great communication skills of Mother Theresa referring back to her sanctity of life and her desire to help as the key elements that facilitate her great influence.

⁶⁴ Harari, *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell*, 244.

⁶⁵ Susan Cain, *The Rise of the New Groupthink*, The New York Times, 15 Jan 2012. She explains the case of the inventor of the PC, which was willing to donate without cost the item for the sake of having a better world in which more people would enjoy the advantages of computers. He eventually co-founded Apple with Steve Jobs. The case is one of personal research against the current trend of working mostly in groups. A strategic leader's role will be to foster creativity in whatever individual or collective way, while creating team efforts that would add value to individual efforts.

⁶⁶ Bill George et al, "Discovering your authentic leadership", Harvard Business Review, (Feb 2007): 129.

⁶⁷ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, 162.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 133, citing O'Brien.

⁶⁹ R. Craig Bullis, "Self-Awareness: Enhancing Strategic Leader Development", in *Strategic Leadership, the General's Art*, (Vienna, VA, Management Concepts, 2009), p 239.

⁷⁰ Stoller, page 156. His team at the Department of State consist of: Dean Acheson, Robert Lovett, Will Clayton, Charles Bohlen, and George F. Kennan. Including Marshall they were called the **six wise men**). Gen Marshall was always focused in the education of his team as well as his own education; this development would be needed to adapt to the different responsibilities he held.

⁷¹ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 161-162.

⁷² Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, (New York, NY, Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 2001).

⁷³ Havard, *Virtuous Leadership*, 24.

⁷⁴ Mark H. Moore. *Creating Public Value, Strategic Management in Government*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁷⁵ Jenniffer Rowley, "What do we need to know about Wisdom?" *Management Decision* 44, no 9 (2006): 1247. The author defines wisdom as the central element of leadership. When authors study virtues in an isolated way. It tends to magnify the effects of the studied virtue so as to place it in the center of all the rest. This so happens with the study of Wisdom, Humility, Magnanimity, or Temperance.

⁷⁶ Judith Chapman, "Anxiety and defective decision making: an elaboration of the groupthink model." *Management decision*. Available at www.emeraldinsight.com/0025-1747.htm (accessed 11/22/2011). She demonstrates that anxiety is an enabler for groupthink, and therefore this study suggests the importance of self-control to avoid it.

⁷⁷ Cameron Kim and Arran Caza, "Organizational and leadership virtues and the role of forgiveness," *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* no. 9.1 (Summer 2002): 33-48. The authors propose the importance of organizational forgiveness to affect individual and collective outcomes; and they suggest two vital roles for leaders in fostering forgiveness, by providing meaning and vision; and by providing legitimacy and support. The authors also invite scholars to begin exploring the important –and long-neglected- issue of virtues.

⁷⁸ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1963): 64 for moral virtues: "treats people with benevolence, justice and righteousness, and reposes confidence in them"; 65 for the qualities of the general, mentioned in the main text of the paper; and 87 for the supreme requirements of generalship, that "are a clear perception, the harmony of his host, a profound strategy coupled with far-reaching plans, an understanding of the seasons and an ability to examine the human factors."

⁷⁹ José Ramón Ayllón Vega, *Filosofía Mínima*, (Barcelona, Spain. Editorial Ariel, 2nd ed, 2005):207 for the Spanish popular saying; 209 for the explanation of the Plato virtues.

⁸⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1976) Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, p 102. Its Chapter Three, *On Military Genius*, p 100-112, analyzes the needs for a military leader, including some considerations of the strategic level.

⁸¹ Sun Tzu, chapters I and II. Clausewitz, specially book one, chapter seven, *Friction on war*, p 119-121.

⁸² As in the rest of the tables, the importance of each virtue to each area of competency is stressed, in the top of each cell, with a minus sign +/- when the virtue is of little relevance, and with a number of plus signs +/- indicating the relative importance (not absolute value) of each virtue to the area of competency.

⁸³ Ayllon Vega, *Filosofía Mínima*, 211.

⁸⁴ George E. Reed, "Toxic Leadership," *Military Review*, (July-August 2004): 67-71. First introduced in the US Army the concept of Toxic Leadership.

⁸⁵ Reed, George E. and Bullis, R. Craig, "The Impact of Destructive Leadership on Senior Military Officers and Civilian Employees," *Armed Forces & Society*, Volume 36, no. 1 (October 2009): 5-18. The article published a study conducted at the Army War College, class of 2008 about negative or destructive leadership behaviors, and the relationship between leadership and levels of satisfaction.

⁸⁶ Glanz, Jeffrey, "Five Essential Virtues for Leading Ethically." *Principal Leadership*, (May 2008): 64. This study coincides with the three virtues identified by Glanz - courage judgment and humility- and considers that the other two traits mentioned by him are not properly virtues – impartiality and empathy- and can be included as part of compassion and justice, in the way described above.

⁸⁷ Alexandre Havard, author of *Virtuous Leadership*, telephone interview from Moscow by author, March 18, 2012, reproduced with Mr. Havard's permission.

⁸⁸ This list of outputs is based on an in-class presentation during seminar at the USAWC. The source material is still a work in progress; hence the faulty parallel structure.

⁸⁹ Havard, *Virtuous Leadership*, 109.

⁹⁰ Sefa Haybor et al, "Value Congruence and Charismatic Leadership in CEO–Top Manager Relationships: An Empirical Investigation," *Journal of Business Ethics* 102 (2011): 237-254.

⁹¹ Klann, *Building character. Strengthening the heart of Good Leadership*, Appendix. C, 169-181.